

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Memory, A Philosophical Study.* BY SVEN BERNECKER. (NEW YORK: OXFORD UP, 2010.  
Pp. VIII + 276. PRICE \$65.00.)

In the light of its importance, the fact that memory has been a neglected topic in the recent philosophy of mind is quite surprising. Testimony to that neglect is the fact that very few book-length discussions of memory have come out in the forty years that have elapsed since Don Locke's *Memory* (Anchor Books, 1971). To say that Sven Bernecker's *Memory, A Philosophical Study* is a welcome addition to the literature is therefore an understatement.

Bernecker's study is almost entirely devoted to the nature of memory and offers detailed discussions of the fundamental philosophical issues this raises. The book starts with an examination of the concept of memory and the various types of memory (chapter 1) and of memory's connection with personal identity (chapter 2). The lion's share of the monograph is however devoted to the consideration of vexed issues in the philosophy of memory: the connections between remembering and knowing (chapter 3), the role of causation in an account of memory (chapters 4 and 5) and the multifarious problems regarding the fixation of memory's content (chapters 6 to 8).

The book's structure is very clear, the available theoretical options systematically discussed and the level of argumentation is consistently high. Bernecker has also done a great job in combining classical discussions in the philosophy of memory pertaining to issues such as the role of causation and the relations between remembering and knowing with more recent issues having to do with content externalism. This synthesis is one of the main virtues of his book. For these reasons, *Memory, A Philosophical Study* will prove essential reading for philosophers interested in memory, a domain where it is likely to structure the future debates, but also for philosophers whose concerns lie in the impact of content externalism on the philosophy of mind.

Amongst the theses Bernecker defends in the course of his study, the following deserve special mention. First, the epistemic theory of memory – the thesis that memory is a form of knowledge – is argued to be faulty. The author offers reasons to conclude that memory, as opposed to knowledge, does not imply belief or justification as well as for the claim that it can function as a (limited) generative epistemic source. Second, the causal theory of memory is argued to be more convincing and explanatorily more fruitful than its rivals. Third, the relevant causal relations are investigated via the notion of memory traces and Bernecker explains how to supplement the analysis so as to resolve issues pertaining to memory

transplants, suggestibility and prompted recall. Fourth, the author endorses 'pastist' externalism about memory content, the claim that the content of a memory is fixed by the environment the subject was in when he formed the original thought on which his memory depends. Bernecker convincingly argues that, notwithstanding some of its surprising implications for knowledge of our own past mental states and for personal identity, pastist externalism proves less problematic than its rivals. Moreover, a detailed discussion of the so-called memory argument allows him to show that pastist externalism does not deprive subjects of past knowledge. Fifth, the identity theory of memory – the claim that the contents of a memory and of the relevant past representation are identical – is shown to fly in the face of the fact that memory is often reconstructive. To keep the possible variations between the contents of the two representations within reasonable limits, Bernecker then appeals to the notion of a relevant entailment: the content of the past representation must be usable in a deductive argument to the content of the relevant token memory representation.

Let me now briefly consider two potential sources of dissatisfaction with Bernecker's discussion. The first lies in its exclusive focus on propositional memory and the potential distortions to which this may lead. Now, Bernecker argues that the distinction between propositional and experiential memory is not very sharp. This is indeed the case, since, for instance, reports of experiential memory often have a propositional form. However, this does not entail that no important distinctions are to be made between cases where we are dealing exclusively with propositional memory and cases where the relevant propositional representation is due to the occurrence of an experiential memory. On the face of it, it is one thing to simply remember that one saw a red sparrow, another to judge that one saw such a bird because one remembers seeing one. The first case seems to involve not much besides a preserved belief. The second, however, seems to be similar to what typically happens with perception-based judgements, i.e. specific experiences appear to motivate the relevant judgements, which are here past-tensed judgements (cf. Tyler Burge's distinction between preservative and substantive memory). Clearly, a distinction along these lines has significant impact on many issues in the philosophy of mind and in epistemology. Let me here focus on two issues that prove important for Bernecker's own argumentation.

First, many philosophers have experiential memory in mind when suggesting that memory can acquaint us with the past. The relevant notion of acquaintance, which Bernecker only briefly remarks upon, and the consequences it is typically claimed to have (e.g. that of providing a distinctive form of justification for past-tensed judgements, of making past-tensed demonstrative thoughts possible or of allowing the subject to understand from the first-person perspective why he is right in making past-tensed judgements) indeed rely on the idea that experiential memory is an indispensable means of accessing the past. And the fact that the distinction between propositional and experiential memory may be blurred from the third-person point of view from which Bernecker conducts his discussion may reveal some of the limitations inherent to an exclusive focus on this point of view. Second, this distinction is arguably also needed if one wants, as the author

himself does, to contend the possibility of non-propositional and non-conceptual memory, i.e. memory of events, persons or places. Indeed, the question arises as to the nature of the memory episodes allowing one to stand in intentional relations with such entities. It is difficult to see what they may be apart from experiential memories.

The second source of dissatisfaction lies in Bernecker's discussion of epistemological issues connected to propositional memory. First, many will perceive the dismissal of internalism about memory knowledge and justification as insufficiently motivated. The main reason offered against this position relates to the fact that memory beliefs often have a positive epistemic status even though the subject cannot articulate the reasons for which he formed them in the first place. However, this in itself proves insufficient to motivate epistemic externalism. One option that has its advocates consists in suggesting that we should for that reason and related ones divorce memory knowledge from memory justification. Discussion of that issue, which may in the end reinforce Bernecker's position, is something one can legitimately regret. Second, the conditions that must be met for memory beliefs to qualify as justified are not sufficiently explored. In particular, given the kind of externalism endorsed by the author, one neglected but important issue (made salient when the belief was defeated at the time it was acquired) concerns the specification of a belief-retaining mechanism that is psychologically realistic and reliable. Third, remembering that *p* is a psychological attitude that contrasts with other attitudes such as perceiving or imagining the same proposition. Bernecker remains surprisingly silent on its nature until the final pages where he endorses a functionalist approach. This will likely be met with some legitimate scepticism. Remembering, it may be argued, is an attitude to which we have a more direct access than through our knowledge that a representation plays a given functional role. Moreover, how can we deploy the past tense concepts that feature in the awareness of the relevant functional role independently of experiences of something as past? Does this imply that we have to resurrect in the end the classical idea that 'impressions to remember' play an indispensable role?

These worries notwithstanding, *Memory, A Philosophical Study* is an excellent book and will likely remain the best study on the topic for some time to come. Its rigorous treatment of the central issues in the philosophy of memory repays careful reading; no one concerned with memory can afford to ignore it.

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*The Ethics of Voting.* By JASON BRENNAN. (Princeton UP, 2011, Pp. x + 222. Price £20.95.)

There is an underlying assumption, in democratic societies, that voting represents a citizen's 'duty'. Those who do not vote are often criticised for failing to show appropriate concern for the life of their political community; they are seen as